

# The New Social Contract Between Generations

Profiguration

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flies than a gallon of gall”**

Coexistence reinforced daily

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## 5 “A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall”

Coexistence reinforced daily

When I was little and growing up, going through adolescence and youth and even adulthood, my mother surprised me with this expression: “A drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall”. And I say that she surprised me because I used to come when I was in some way angry, and I would tell her something that worried me slightly or something else that drove me crazy. But in any case, I was in full conflict and arguing to see how I would respond to this conflict situation. I say as a child, and I say well because I already remember school situations that I resolved, in a way, at home with my mother. I spoke of adolescence and youth just before, during or after the military. I even speak of maturity because whenever I needed her, I found her patient and smiling when I went to see her—already married and with a daughter—to tell her things that worried me. My father also nodded, but he was more silent, and along with the smile, he winked at me in a clear expression of silent confirmation of what my mother was saying, but he also received it personally as confirmation of what I did, which would be fine because of the trust he had in me (and for which I was grateful).

In any case, it was my mother who always and, under any concept and situation, stated that she did not want conflicts and, above all, that she did not want “fights”, that people should love each other and that we had to understand the motives of others and see what they needed. And, in any case, too, you had to proceed kindly with a dialogue, speaking “sweetly” ... a drop of honey being worth more than a gallon of gall.

It is evident that she guessed the right key, since dialogue, as we will see later, appears to be the main and most effective element

(and method) to resolve conflicts. Concerning the understanding that accompanies this dialogue, I have been learning in a personal, academic and sociological way that it is fundamental in interpersonal relationships, negotiation and mediation. This is closely related to empathy, to putting ourselves in the shoes of the “other” person. Likewise, empathy is reinforced with the recognition of interdependence, belonging to humanity, personal and collective vulnerability (of human beings in general) and the love that saves us.

### **5.1 Conflict versus violence**

The human being is a social being who relates interpersonally and who, to compensate for his extreme vulnerability, collaborates with other human beings in groups, in communities and in society: he lives with others, and he coexists. Throughout this coexistence and the different collaborations and cooperation that develop, exchanges of opinions, debates, discussions and conflicts, in short, occur. Therefore, we could conclude that human beings have conflicts because they collaborate because they coexist. It is already known that coexistence, that friction, creates affection but also conflicts. However, conflicts, when overcome and managed appropriately, are also resolved and can improve coexistence. That is to say that, conceptually, conflict is inherent to the human being as a social being and that it is neither positive nor negative; it depends on the situation that develops behind it. Frequently, we tend to assimilate conflict into a negative issue, to violence. However, violence is a bad way to (not) resolve conflicts. Therefore, conflict is not synonymous with violence; it should not be. The debate and dialogue that the conflict resolution process can entail may result in the improvement of a damaged coexistence that led to that conflict.

In sociology, the topic of conflict is crucial because it is one of the issues that unites the individual and group, personal and social, structure and action. Simmel highlighted that conflict is precisely a form of socialisation and one of the most intense. And Comte, who proposed the neologism of sociology<sup>1</sup>, advocated that what this social science should carry out was the study of the laws of social statics and dynamics, and—among them—conflicts, thus marking the fundamental perspectives of sociology (Haralambos and Holborn, 1990):

1 Structural perspectives that analyse society as a whole. Among them, we can highlight functionalism, which emphasises stability

and other perspectives that emphasise, at the same time, conflict: Marxist (conflicts between classes) and non-Marxist (conflicts between social groups).

- 2 Interpretive perspectives that analyse social action and small social groups. It is worth highlighting the figure of Weber in his attempt to explain human behaviour, with motivations and conditions. Likewise, symbolic interactionism is important, which interprets human behaviour in the consequences and concepts themselves; phenomenology in general, which studies how man understands the world; and ethnomethodology, which analyses the categorisation of the world that is carried out to develop social life.
- 3 It is interesting to highlight the figure of Giddens, who, with his theory of structuration, has tried to unite and overcome the differentiation between structural perspectives and social action. In this line, among others, Sztompka also finds himself with his “unified socio-individual field”, as a third way—*“becoming social”*—that overcomes the dichotomy between (personal) action and (social) structures.

Other sociologists have studied conflict centrally. Thus, for Merton, for example, conflict has a structural character and can occur between groups (macro level) or between individuals (micro level).<sup>1</sup> For Dahrendorf, social conflict has a structural origin and is any opposing relationship over norms and expectations. Through it, the change and development of societies are based. Furthermore, it has a dimension that goes beyond the individual; sociology must study the social units that come into conflict,<sup>2</sup> and thus help to understand it. This author highlights that the fundamental thing about social conflict is to promote evolution and change in social groups, although he specifies that issues of conflict are issues of power or dominance. Habermas represents the communicative paradigm, in which language concentrates the objective and subjective, institutional and everyday, and allows, in this sense, to establish a universality that can generate alternatives in situations of conflict and overcome it dialogically, through negotiation and consensus.<sup>3</sup> In any case, conflict theorists such as Rex and Dahrendorf, among others, openly criticise the excessive consensualism of the functionalist proposals of the middle of the previous century. Rex, specifically, highlights that social systems are organised around a consensus of values or conflict situations that can range from peaceful negotiation to overt violence. On the other hand, Norbert Elias’ figurationism postulates that growing interdependence

lowers the threshold of tolerance of violence (provided there is monopolisation of violence by the State at a macro level and individual self-control at a micro level), so there would wait until the development of ICT (Internet, web, etc.) would reduce violence within the framework of globalisation; however, the opposite has happened, increasing violence both nationally and internationally (Noya and Rodríguez, 2010: 194–195<sup>4</sup>). In *The Civilization Process*, Elias develops his arguments concerning the decrease in violence at the macro, meso and micro levels. It is a great contribution to sociology in its aspects of conflictology. In short, and following Elias's theories, we can conclude that the network of interdependencies places conflict and tension at the centre, and therefore, the processual nature of social phenomena: societies are configurations in perpetual motion, that is, unstable frameworks in process and tension, of interdependencies between institutions, fields or positions that maintain both relations of integration and conflict (Martín, 2010: 90–91).

In any case, we can differentiate the contributions of authors such as Durkheim and Parsons, who emphasise the order and harmony inherent in human societies, according to functionalist postulates from those of Marx and Weber, for example, which highlight the omnipresence of social conflict. Coser, a functionalist, follows what Simmel identifies as the integrative effects of conflict by considering, precisely, its repercussions for the cohesion, identity and strengthening of social groups (“the functions of social conflict”). Elton Mayo advocates the idea that it is more a problem of individual maladjustment than a structural problem. Collins develops the theory of conflict in a synthetic and integrated way with more *micro-sociological* orientations, recovering the role of the interactions of everyday life and ethnomethodology (Goffman) and addressing it, therefore, from a more individual point of view. Along these lines, Collins understands that social structures (as patterns of interaction) are inseparable from the actors who build them. For its part, phenomenological sociology (Shutz, Berger and Luckmann) orients its postulates to the resolution of practical problems and neglects the notion of social structure. As for Elias, we can conclude, as we have commented previously, that the network of interdependencies places conflict and tension at the centre and confirms that social phenomena have a procedural nature, between relations of integration and confrontation. All of this helps us conceptualise the conflict and rethink the models and practices of negotiation, mediation or arbitration.

Within the framework of communicative action (Habermas) and dialogue (Platonic *dia logos*), a dynamic typology of conflicts is established from the sociological point of view, distinguishing between<sup>5</sup> a) *intrapersonal conflicts* (with oneself, with the same subject, due to issues of tension and contradictions in one's socialisation, etc.); b) *interpersonal conflicts* (between diverse subjects, due to differences in criteria, objectives and interests, power relations, dominance, etc.); c) *intragroup conflicts* (between the group itself) and d) *intergroup conflicts* (between different groups). The group, here, is also understood in a broad and open sense: we can refer to groups of people, such as small collectives, but also to communities, nations and states. Some trends sometimes point to the opportunity of some strategies that reconfigure intergroup conflicts into intragroup conflicts. Indeed, if the situation, the context and the framework in which the conflict develops can be configured in terms of intragroup conflict, we can see new possibilities on the horizon of resolution. And vice versa, if the face of an intragroup conflict ends up being posed as an intergroup conflict, it surely means that the group enters a process of decomposition and reorganisation (probably with the creation of new, different groups). In work contexts or organisations and institutions, it is usually more effective, whenever possible, to consider changing the consideration from intergroup conflict to intragroup conflict. If the perspective of intergroup conflict is maintained, differences will be highlighted, something that separates, and the achievement of the interests of some against the interests of others and the “intergroup” conflict itself will serve as internal cohesion to the groups confronted, so the collaborative possibilities within the organisation or institution can significantly decrease. On the other hand, if it can be contextualised in terms of intragroup conflict, what must be highlighted is belonging to the organisation or institution itself, sharing common general objectives and, above all, that everyone wins.<sup>6</sup>

Among the strategies, techniques and practices of conflict resolution and transformation, we highlight negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Conflict resolution is fundamentally based on negotiation. In most cases, it is the parties in conflict who negotiate directly about their possible solution. Now, if this direct negotiation between the parties is not enough and there comes a time when the intervention of a third party is necessary, it should be mediation. Its mission is to facilitate dialogue, the construction of alternatives, consensus and agreement between the parties in conflict, but it does not impose or

dictate the solution; rather, it is the subjects themselves who reach the agreement in light of the various alternative solutions that are facilitated through mediation. Ultimately, we must not forget that mediation is essentially a negotiation, although assisted by a third party. If mediation is not sufficient and the conflict is not resolved, arbitration may be necessary: a third party will decide (sentence) the solution to the conflict. Even in this last circumstance, a minimum agreement must be reached: the parties will abide by the solution specified by the arbitrator. When it comes to more affective and personal issues (emotional issues), in which the common objective is reconciliation and maintenance of relationships between the members of the group, it is necessary to try, whenever possible, the means of negotiation or mediation. In the educational field, for example, the so-called mediation between equals is increasingly gaining importance, which consists of the peers themselves, adolescents and young people prepared for it, being the mediators in conflicts (between equals).

Therefore, it is necessary to recover and develop what a culture of peace means, a peaceful and pacifying socialisation and the existing possibilities of educating in conflict. Conflict is often interpreted as a negative issue in interpersonal and social relationships, but we must not forget that, in principle, conflicts themselves, and from a holistic position, can be a potential element of growth and development. It is the management and transformation of the conflict that will end up giving a positive or negative nuance to the conflict situation. In group relationships and educational organisations and institutions, as in other areas of our daily lives, conflictive situations occur because conflict is inherent to human action; what is not inherent to human beings is violence and war. The management of the conflict must convey non-violent alternatives in an attempt to resolve it definitively or at least reduce its virulence as much as possible, making the most of the positive opportunities that may be generated.

The conflict reflects the complexity of human existence and social existence. This complexity enriches personal relationships and social groups since conflict can effectively lead to a change that means improvement, development and progress, the result of contrasting various points of view and finding creative alternatives that can arise from debate, exchange of opinions and dialogue. It is practically impossible to find a formula that eliminates all possibility of conflict (and perhaps it should not be sought); therefore, conflict resolution in organisations and groups aims to train in conflict management from

constructive perspectives and resolve the burden of the conflictual nature of human relationships without repressing them. Conflict is, along these lines, a sociological element of the first order. In this sense, its resolution has a sociological function of transformation, management... even, as Galtung himself would say (Cornelius and Faire, 1996: 265), a creative transformation. That is why we talk, in general, about conflict management to seek a point of harmony in the present and the future. The new strategic framework to confront them is based on a renewed philosophy of “you win, I win” (Cornelius and Faire, 1996: 22–32) that overcomes the competitive idea of “I win and you lose”, but first of all, that of “I win”. The latter can be considered a first step, but we must establish (attitudes, values and norms) the strategy and philosophy of “you win and I also win”<sup>7</sup> because they should not be seen as contradictory or opposite, but complementary, synergistic and mutually reinforced.

Most problems of aggression, violence or tense group relationships have their origin in the lack of resources to analyse conflictive situations and develop strategies that allow for managing the problems raised. There is a clear demand from professionals concerning conflicts in education, groups, organisations and institutions. It can help to frame the group conflict with greater foundation and comprehensiveness, from a theoretical preparation in its resolution (philosophy, sociology, social psychology and psychopedagogy) and an applied and systematic intervention, with criteria and strategies, with alternatives. We cannot forget that conflict transformation (*multitrack diplomacy*<sup>8</sup>) is multidisciplinary and that communication is the backbone of all axes, playing a fundamental role. From the outset, we do not want conflicts, but since there are conflicts, we must approach their management as an alternative transformation that is an opportunity for true improvement, individually and in groups, personally and socially. And all this, in no case does it mean violence. This must be annulled from the roots.

## **5.2 The violence of the four “-isms”**

We have commented in this previous section that violence is not synonymous with conflict and that violence is a bad way to (not) resolve conflicts.

In this sense, in the definition of “conflict” in English, in the Cambridge Dictionary, we find, in its first meaning, that it is an active

disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles, although, in its second meaning, it does refer to struggle. (fight) between two or more groups of people or countries. In any case, “violence” does not appear in the Thesaurus of synonyms and related words (yes, discussion, debate, disagreement, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

If we consult the definition of “violence”, in British English we find a definition that refers to actions or words that are intended to harm people and also relates it to extreme force. In American English, it refers to extremely forceful actions that are intended to harm people or may cause harm. And, also in American English, specific examples include “racial”, “ethnic” and “domestic”<sup>10</sup> violence. “Conflict” does not appear in the Thesaurus of Synonyms and Related Words.

In short, we wanted to point out the difference between “conflict” and “violence” and, above all, distinguish them with the aim of not working conceptually (and in this sense guiding our individual and social action) as if they were synonyms. In this sense, it is essential to remember the words attributed to Gandhi: “there are no paths to peace, peace is the way” and “non-violence and truth are inseparable”. Therefore, violence does not resolve any conflict, violence only generates more violence and deepens pain, inequalities and injustices.

We will focus on the four main types of violence that endanger social cohesion and society itself: racism, classism, male chauvinism and *ageism*.

Many times this type of violence can have a common base, heterophobia, that is, the fear of the (supposedly) “different” or, in short, the fear of difference. Very often we observe that violence is based on fear and insecurity that is felt when some situation or some person is perceived as strange, alien to an individual and/or socially constructed “we”.

According to the WHO, violence is the intentional use of physical force and/or threats against oneself, another person, a group or a community that results or is very likely to result in trauma, psychological harm, developmental problems or death. Galtung differentiates between clearly visible and direct violence and another type of violence that is more hidden and not so manifest. Direct violence is visible through behaviour (physical, verbal attacks, etc.). Indirect violence can be cultural, through attitudes, or structural, through the denial of needs (social injustice, for example). The virtue of these definitions and classifications lies in recognising violence not only in behaviours and physical attacks but also in certain political and socioeconomic

attitudes and decisions, structurally. For this reason, for example, when we talk about *bullying* (school bullying) or *mobbing* (workplace bullying), in addition to whether or not there are physical attacks, there can be verbal attacks or even silence, creating a “void” for a specific person. We observe here the confirmation of the importance of social interaction and the need for recognition by other people: when this does not occur, creating a vacuum (the denial of the existence of the other) is incurring violence. Likewise, psychological violence can be very subtle, “simply” telling (the other person) that he is worthless, that he knows nothing, that he has never been or will not be able to do something important, undermining, of course, his self-esteem.

For our essay, we focus on interpersonal violence. *The report on the global status of violence prevention* by the WHO and UNDP<sup>11</sup> indicates that it occurs between members of the same family, in couples, between friends, acquaintances and strangers. The report evaluates the scale of implementation of 18 violence prevention programs that constitute “unbeatable investments”. We highlight, among others, that half of the countries implement school programs so that children and adolescents learn life skills such as non-violent conflict resolution; half of the countries promote activities aimed at changing gender norms that support violence against women, but less than a quarter of countries prepare public information campaigns to prevent elder abuse.

Interpersonal violence is a risk factor for lifelong health and social problems, since, as the WHO indicates, a high level of violence in the family or community paralyses people’s ability to maintain their livelihoods, as well as the political, social and economic development options of the countries. We will mainly highlight these four types of fundamental violence in social interactions and community relations, such as racism, classism, machismo and ageism.

### **5.2.1 Racism**

Racism is an ideology, attitudes and discriminatory behaviours that express contempt (and/or fear) towards supposedly racial characteristics, which end up justifying social inequality based on all this and violence (expressed in various ways) towards people of a supposed race.

According to Taguieff, there are three levels of heterophobia, which can be applied, in some way, to any of the three -isms to which

we refer, although this author identifies them mainly as three levels of use of the categorising term of racism:

- *primary racism*, the supposed foundation of heterophobia.<sup>12</sup> It designates a fairly general psychosocial phenomenon and almost a universal reaction, according to the author: the feeling of distrust towards the Other or the foreigner, and the spontaneous perception of the unknown Other as an enemy.
- *secondary racism* involves an amalgamation of various elements (affective and discursive) that are framed in a rationalisation of primary racism with arguments such as economic or political competition between two human groups, reorienting aggressiveness. In ordinary language, it is usually designated as *xenophobia* or *chauvinism*, and in more scholarly language, by the term *ethnocentrism*.
- *tertiary racism* is constituted from the discourse, argumentation and “biological” vocabulary of race (with reference points in physical anthropology) and looks for *scientific ways* of legitimation. The notion of tertiary racism seems to reject all elaborate forms of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, involving itself in theorising from the biological sciences.

In any case, and according to Wieviorka (1992: 20), racism highlights physical or biological attributes that supposedly shape the behaviours, culture and personality of social groups and that end up justifying relationships of domination, exclusion, persecution or destruction. The logic of inferiorisation is intended to ensure discriminatory treatment against the prejudged group, and the logic of differentiation tends to isolate it and, in extreme cases, to expel it and even exterminate it.

### 5.2.2 *Classism*

Classism is an ideology, attitude and discriminatory behaviour that expresses contempt (and/or fear) of class and socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, which end up justifying social inequality based on all of this and violence (expressed in various ways) before people of a supposedly different class. Classism is a system that tends to maintain differences between social classes.

Sometimes, this classism is mixed with *aporophobia* (and even racism, concerning foreigners and/or poor immigrants). *Aporophobia*,

as Cortina (2017) points out, is the fear of poverty, which is materialised by personifying it in violence against the poor, classism, in short. There are several ways to express *aporophobia* and/or classism: political parties with xenophobic discourses, certain groups or organisations with airs of superiority over people who have fewer resources than them, and even solitary individuals (apparently). The most representative modes are speeches and hate crimes.

In this sense, violence can be manifest and direct, but in classism sometimes this violence is very subtle, varying according to various forms of contempt, arrogant tolerance, haughtiness, arrogance and even vanity. This contempt is translated in the forms (and in substance) of the prohibition of entry to “select” clubs or activities, only allowed to a few people and some groups that are the “selected ones”.<sup>13</sup> For Weber, the basis of classism is in the status achieved by a certain group of people who, once achieved, formulate it as a closure, a preserve closed to others. Some types of conflict, violence and even revolutions can be explained by this well-rooted classism personally and structurally, which prevents others from accessing the status of the elites. According to Bourdieu, classism can also be a source of so-called symbolic violence. This is a type of indirect violence, very subtle, that can be exercised by those who have more power or are in a dominant class over others. Bourdieu even speaks of a certain complicity on the part of those who suffer this violence, since they are not aware of it (they even internalise it). The discriminatory situation is seen as “normal” by those who are discriminated against themselves because they do not perceive it as such discrimination; it would be something like if it were seen that it should be that way, in a status quo that should remain, because the rich deserve it for their birth, lineage and preparation (the school itself can sometimes collaborate in this symbolic violence because it can also be a source of distinction and reproduction of classes<sup>14</sup>).

As Cortina warns, our brain, from the outset, is *aporophobic*. But also, biologically, we learn through stimuli in the form of both positive and negative values, which help us when making decisions. Different tendencies come into conflict: self-interest in survival, control of the situation, dissociation to protect oneself from unpleasant things and selective sympathy and empathy. Likewise, the brain has codes or conduit patterns that have been formed and transformed with evolution. Already in ancient times, humans grouped themselves into small groups according to their ethnicity and culture, out

of *self-interest* in surviving, since they needed mutual help among themselves. That is also why altruism began to flow, especially within the group itself. For those outside the group, there could be altruism, but always hoping to receive something in return. Therefore, Cortina (2017: 79) states that “biologically we are prepared for selfishness, but also for cooperation”. From this perspective, this author presents different proposals to overcome aporophobia that can be extrapolated in the fight against classism, in general. First of all, it is necessary to educate conscience, highlighting the importance of moral conscience and reputation (society’s assessment of how we act).<sup>15</sup> Likewise, this author proposes moral bio-improvement as an alternative or complement to education, since this may prove insufficient to guide and/or educate people’s moral and social conscience. Another proposal for improvement is, evidently, to eradicate poverty and thus reduce inequality; furthermore, the “hospitality” of a country’s good reception of foreigners stands out to a large extent: sometimes classism and racism are closely linked, along with aporophobia. We must also note that this hospitality, as kindness, welcome and help, cannot be based primarily on charity<sup>16</sup> (although it can accompany the entire process), but on justice and equity, within the framework of a deep respect for the other (for equals), for the human.

### 5.2.3 *Male chauvinism*

Continuing with the parallelism of racism and classism, we can determine that machismo is an ideology, attitudes and discriminatory behaviours that express the supposed superiority of men over women and their contempt, based on supposedly natural characteristics, which end up justifying social inequality based on all this and violence (expressed in various ways) towards women by men. Sometimes, this violence is also manifested against other people who do not identify as female or male, or who do, but in other ways different from the traditional vision of a sexist patriarchy.

At the base of sexist violence, we can find practically the same parameters of *heterophobia* that we mentioned previously: the feeling of distrust towards the *Other* (perception as an enemy) and the search and use of *scientific* ways of legitimation (superiority of man over women), within the framework of a paternalistic and sexist society and culture. Machismo is the attitude based on the attribution of superiority to men over women. The attribution of “superiority” can

effectively generate sexist violence in the entire trinomial that Galtung recognises as violence: behaviour (direct violence), attitudes (cultural violence) and denial of needs (structural violence of a patriarchal, sexist society).

Sexist violence is also known as gender violence or violence against women, although as indicated by the “Virtual Knowledge Center to End Violence against Women and Girls” of the UN (“UN Women”<sup>17</sup>), “gender violence” refers to violence carried out against a person due to the gender he or she has, as well as the expectations about the role that he or she has to fulfil in a society or culture: female subordination to society and its increasing vulnerability to violence. However, it is also noted that men and boys can also be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence. However, this type of violence is mostly carried out against women and girls. In 2020 it was declared the year of gender equality by the UN, with the motto of International Women’s Day (March 8) being “I am from Generation Equality: For women’s rights”.

#### **5.2.4 Ageism**

*Ageism*, along these lines, can be interpreted as an ideology, attitudes and discriminatory behaviours that express prejudice and contempt for characteristics of advanced age (but also of other ages, such as young people), which end up justifying social inequality based on all this and violence (abuse, among other forms) of older people, mainly.

According to the WHO, elder abuse is a single or repeated act that causes harm or suffering to an older person, or the lack of appropriate measures to prevent it, that occurs in a relationship based on trust. Therefore, it can be by action or by omission. This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights and includes physical, sexual, psychological or emotional abuse; violence for economic or material reasons; abandonment; negligence; and the serious impairment of dignity and lack of respect.<sup>18</sup>

Once again, the trinomial of violence indicated by Galtung can occur. In this case, the various behaviours (direct violence), attitudes (cultural violence) and the denial of needs (structural violence of a competitive society of production and consumption) have older adults (and also youths). We must stop these behaviours, being vigilant so that they do not occur, and ensuring that the public administration, the community (friends, family, neighbourhood), educators and social workers,

and nurses, for example. Attitudes must be worked on from a framework of profigurative socialisation, both in the educational system and in situations of social education and also informal education, through social networks, ICT, television and leisure activities, raising awareness about the equality and respect that people deserve at any stage of our lives, at any age. This awareness also includes the new view of equity and solidarity that must overcome the mercantilist vision of the “economic” value (productive and consumption) of people. “Retirement” should not be seen as the “withdrawal” of the older people from the market. It is necessary to recover the etymological root of “*iubilare*” (scream with joy) in the sense of continuing with the continuous vital process that presents us with new alternatives to adulthood that highlight wisdom, within active ageing: the joy of living, to be older, to be recognised and respected, personally and socially. This is what we will specify in the next section, in the field of profiguration.

### **5.3 Profiguration, conflict and mediations: dialogue and conversation**

To overcome these four “-isms” and be able to move forward against all types of individual and social violence and injustice, multisectoral actions and interdisciplinary collaboration are required, both to prevent abuse and to act against it: the adaptation of laws and regulations and your application; social services for the provision of legal, financial and home support; the educational system, with awareness and education campaigns for younger people, men and women, as well as adults; and the health field, to detect and treat victims. Among all this, it is worth highlighting, in addition to detection and legal and support interventions, the prevention of abuse with awareness and education campaigns through programs in intercultural schools, gender equality and intergenerational programs. We are aware that progress is being made, with increasingly notable improvements worldwide, in legal frameworks and fairer laws, but there is not always evidence of the effectiveness of interventions. Without giving up, profiguration must be present in overcoming the four “-isms”, since only the combination of contrasting visions between life experience and new visions free of prejudices can allow progress in constructive, complementary and intergenerational dialogues. Girls, women and older people women, together with boys, men and older people men, we must combine solutions and we need to avert violence.

Especially, the fight against gender violence is framed in profiguration, since young and older women, and also young and older men, must go in unison. The song “Un violador en tu camino”<sup>19</sup> is a Chilean song that has spread everywhere as a feminist anthem for women of all ages around the world. It is the denunciation against machismo that can be taken as a paradigm of the fight against the four *-isms* and the importance of profiguration, of solidarity between generations and between genders.

The profiguration resumes and enhances Elias’s *figurationism*, highlighting that the growing interdependence lowers the threshold of tolerance of violence. This is not accepted under any circumstances (0 violence from the age of 0). Thus, it is necessary to increase self-control at the micro level through (profigurative) socialisation that promotes human interrelationships between genders and between generations. The development of empathy and dialogue brings together various ideas, needs and experiences. All these need, at a macro level, a democratic, guaranteed legal structural framework that enables fair laws, regulations and norms.<sup>20</sup>

Etzioni, for example, presents a proposal that he calls the “community society” or the “community of communities”, with the idea of starting from the community identities most deeply rooted in people, in which the subject is constructed, because with this base, they are already working for the common social good. This framework (and glue) that Etzioni speaks of to unite the mosaic of differences cannot be detrimental to individual rights versus group identities, which is what some communitarians defend. Profiguration, in this sense, would defend the individual and would also recognise him as a member of a group, thus understanding him, but it would not undermine the rights of the individual against the community, since human rights, for example, are rights of people. This is not incompatible, nor does it contradict the possibility of the collective exercise of human rights.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, social cohesion is given by human interdependence and interaction, by human rights respected and exercised individually and collectively, for all people, from any cultural group (“ethnic”), from any class, of any gender and of any age.

Dialogue and conversation are fundamental for negotiation and mediation, that is, for overcoming the conflict. And dialogue and conversation are nuclear to profiguration since they are the heritage and acrimony of any generation. Each of the vital ages has its

peculiarities, so we would not be able to decide whether any age in life has an advantage or disadvantage over the others. In youth, alternatives are opened and proposed due to the audacity that one has to raise questions or solutions that may appear as “unheard of” or too “ideal”, but precisely in negotiation and especially in mediation, what it is about is opening the range of possibilities for alternative solutions to the conflict. Among older people, the alternatives are open, especially concerning life experience and the elaboration of proposals, initially more slowly and consensually, perhaps with a longer journey.<sup>22</sup>

In any case, to close this chapter on conflict and coexistence, we want to put special emphasis on dialogue and the mediation of words as the quintessence of knowledge and communication... and, ultimately, of this coexistence.

As we can read in the verses of Blas de Otero, we are left with *the word*: “If I have lost my life, my time, everything I threw, like a ring, into the water, if I have lost my voice in the weeds, I am left with word”. We have the word to ensure dialogue in difficult moments, to ensure coexistence. Dialogue refers not only to the exchange of opinions, to speaking and listening—that too—but to something deeper and more effective in conflict resolution: the construction of knowledge thanks to human interaction; the *dia logos*, knowledge in the dyadic relationship. This is that when we talk to other people, we build alternatives to solve the conflict together. Group thinking surpasses individual thinking: the generation of ideas and alternatives is exponentially enriched when they arise from human interaction.

Furthermore, conversation in itself has a value of coexistence, as Simmel said, the enjoyment of the simple act of talking, conversing and enjoying the gathering. Also in pragmatics, we consider *speech acts*, especially as *perlocutionary acts*, situations that when pronouncing something imply carrying it out, together (who says it and who listens to it); if we talk about peace, calm, dialogue and coexistence, we are probably already pacifying, calming, dialoguing and coexisting. In this sense, we must keep in mind that we should not always seek reactive action, but rather we can be proactive: the best-resolved conflict is the one that has not taken place or, at least, the one that has not developed virulently. It is evident that when a developed conflict already exists, we must react to solve it. We should not always wait to see them coming, but we can move forward by laying the foundations

for coexistence for the present and the future. If we work previously creating a situation of trust, good relationships, commitment and group cohesion, either there will be no conflict or, when there is, it is practically certain that it will not develop violently and, probably, it will offer an opportunity to improve the previous situation.

And take care of your emotions. We must recognise them and accept them, but at the same time work with them so that they do not flood everything. We have gone, almost like the law of the pendulum, from not taking them into account and basing all our decisions (and the resolution of conflicts itself) on reason to them being practically the only ones taken into account for these decisions (forgetting, sometimes, reason itself). Nor is this everything in its proper terms. Reason and emotion must be combined to manage a necessary distance from the conflict and approach it from a somewhat more “objective” point of view. That is why it is important, as we have just indicated at the beginning of this section, to take into account the establishment of norms, laws and democratically accepted regulations that can objectively ensure coexistence. We must “objectify” the conflict as much as we can. This means that the conflict should not be “subjectified”; it should not emotionally drag the person; it should not be identified with the subject, but rather it should be treated as an “object” on which we will work together, “*dia-loguing*”, to build alternative agreed solutions. To find a collaborative solution, of a shared “win-win”, to avoid falling into a stubbornness that leads to a “lose-lose” that benefits no one, respecting the “rules of the game” among which we organise our coexistence.

And of missed opportunities for dialogue, we all have experience, young and old. On the other hand, in Spanish or Catalan, for example, the etymological root of reaching an agreement, of agreeing, is *ad(ac)—cor cordis* (from Latin *cor*—heart), which means to unite hearts. Therefore, a profigurative approach is the most advantageous to be able to work on an agreement, within the framework of dialogue (of the construction of knowledge thanks to human interaction) and of experience, training and joint exchange between generations. Combining experiences profiguratively can give us a contrasting communicative framework to strengthen coexistence. Let us not forget that (good) coexistence is the basis for the ultimate purpose of the human being, in the words of Aristotle, *eudaemonia*, happiness, well-being and the good life, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

**Notes**

- 1 Within functionalism, Merton and Coser introduced the theme of conflict; the first considered it dysfunctional, and only the second recognised the possibility that it was functional.
- 2 According to Dahrendorf, there are five: conflict between social roles, between social groups, between sectors of society, between associations that affect the entire society and between supranational organisations.
- 3 However, there are authors who indicate that the impulse that Habermas has given to critical theory, with the study of the problem of communication (communicative competence) between interlocutors who coexist in an unequal and unjust society, has not been an obstacle to exploring the systemic conception of society and that, in a certain way, systems theory and Marxist perspectives have a high degree of compatibility. In this sense, Sztompka states that the functionalist and Marxist schools are interested in the same ideas of contradiction, tension, structural context, etc. finding themselves embarked on the same systemic gender task (see Giner, 1994: 670–671 and 674).
- 4 “His (Elias’) most relevant work for the analysis of international relations is written before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and he pins the hopes of the end of violence between States on a kind of State and universal army that would put an end to the nuclear race, wars, etc. But this should not prevent us from rethinking the role of the Internet in globalisation with tools, those of Elias’s theory, which have been successfully applied in the analysis of other processes, such as the birth of the Principle of Humanitarian Interference in International Law (Deacon), the rise of football as a global sport (Roberston) or the formation of international languages of communication (Swaan)”.
- 5 It is a very interesting way to understand the conflict, differentiating its levels. There are four levels identified: intrapersonal or intrapsychic conflict, interpersonal conflict, intragroup conflict and intergroup conflict (see Lewicki, Saunders and Barry, 2012).
- 6 What is known by the famous expression of “everyone being in the same boat”: either everyone is saved or everyone sinks, wanting to express the importance of seeking joint consensual solutions that, in some way, are framed in the “win-win” (in an “intra”-group conflict).
- 7 Sometimes I propose to university students a small game based on the “prisoner’s dilemma” and game theory, in relation to mixed motive games, between conflict and cooperation (positive sum) by Axelrod (1986), to experience these considerations in a certain way.
- 8 It is the idea of having a world at peace, understanding this pacification as a network system of interconnected activities, which take into account individuals, institutions and communities in general.

- 9 Cambridge Dictionary (Meaning of Conflict in English). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict> (visited on 12/12/2024).
- 10 Extremely forceful actions that are intended to hurt people or are likely to cause damage: racial/ethnic/domestic violence.
- 11 The report on the global status of violence prevention, from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as well as the Global Campaign to Prevent Violence, 2012–2020.
- 12 Also called “panekhthrim” from the Greek “ekhthros”, “enemy”.
- 13 In the South Korean film “Parasites” (2019, winner of the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Festival and four Oscars), a bond is established, in principle, “interested” between the rich and the poor, but the ones and the others become entangled in such a way that a tragically unexpected ending occurs, due to the contempt and classism that triggers it.
- 14 We do not at all deny the real possibilities that thanks to school have been and are given to the so-called social mobility and equality (not always) of opportunities.
- 15 Reputation can sometimes matter more than moral conscience. Sometimes, people can be more supportive and cooperative because of group pressure, because of what they will say, rather than strictly because of moral conscience.
- 16 We do not renounce charity so much as the connotations that have historically accompanied its practice, in relation precisely to a certain classism. A charity well understood is a precious element to accompany priority and fair equity. Charity properly understood is the attitude of solidarity (equal to equal) rather than alms (with the connotation of superiority that it can entail).
- 17 UN WOMEN (United Nations): Defining Violence against Women and Girls. [www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/295-defining-violence-against-women-and-girls.html](http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/295-defining-violence-against-women-and-girls.html) (webpage visited on 12/12/2024).
- 18 See World Health Organization (WHO). Abuse of Older People. [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people) (webpage visited on 12/12/2024).
- 19 Also known as “The rapist is you” (“El violador eres tú”), for being one of the most repeated stanzas. It is a song promoted and performed by the Las Tesis group on November 25, 2019, in Santiago, Chile, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- 20 We agree with Corcuff when he reminds us that the ideas of interdependence and configuration cannot totally replace those of interaction as Elias suggests, since although the notion of interdependence helps to understand chains of interrelationships longer than the direct interaction of individuals, it does not fully resolve the fluidity of some of the situations of daily life that can make, undo and displace already constituted interdependencies, as

interactionist sociology reminds us, “the idea of interdependence, despite its usefulness, has not yet exhausted its thorny question of the articulation of the macro and the micro” (Corcuff, 1998: 29).

- 21 Collective rights are known as “third generation” to differentiate them from traditional individual rights. These collective or “third-generation” rights would be, among others, the right to peace, the right to development, control of natural resources, environmental conservation and educational and religious rights.
- 22 We are aware that without clarification we can fall into “popular” topics, even though we base ourselves mainly on Margaret Mead, Simmel and Norbert Elias, and we argue our neologism and conceptual development from sociology. It is not about indicating that all young people and only they have plasticity, flexibility and creativity and that all older adults and only they have experience and calm. We are referring, obviously and in line with Weber’s ideal types, to sociological explanations that help us, by simplifying it, to better understand complex social reality. And, in this sense, to argue a well-consolidated theory that helps us guide social action in a social-scientific way.